

Jail Survey
County Judges / Magistrates & Commissioners Conference
Louisville, KY
July 14, 2005

Good afternoon. It is good to be with you again.

It is always great to speak to such a great variety of public servants, especially those who have made a commitment to public service at the core level. To most Kentuckians you are the true face of government and I fully understand the challenges local governments face in meeting the day-to-day needs of your communities. Working with counties on a daily basis as Auditor, I understand how governments have to squeeze their budgets to provide services and I truly appreciate that the buck truly does stop with you.

In that regard I want to discuss with you a cooperative effort to help come to grips with a problem that has been plaguing many of your counties: the cost of housing your prisoners and running your county jails.

The blunt truth is: funding incarceration expenses have become a crisis for you and therefore, a crisis for Kentucky. Jail expenditures are a rapidly growing component of county budgets and many simply cannot remain financially viable without an ever-growing infusion of precious county resources – resources that could be used for many other services for taxpayers.

Vince Lang, the executive director of the County Judge Association has said that many counties are contributing 20% of their general fund for [jails] alone. The crisis has already reached grave proportions in some areas, with state officials taking over jail management or advising the closure of facilities.

This jail-funding crisis has hit an area in which government simply cannot abdicate its role. People first banded together, creating communities, for protection. Protection consists of keeping people who do not abide by our rules segregated from those who do, so that we can live and raise a family in peace and without fear.

I realize there are many factors that go into the cost of confinement and many of them are beyond our control. One that is within our ability to influence is the way a detention center is managed. We can work together to improve the management of these facilities, and the Auditor's Office can bring value to that process.

In response to this problem, the State Auditor's Office is launching an initiative to expand fiscal court audit procedures to include a more thorough review of jails. As a first step my office will conduct the first-ever comprehensive survey of county jails and detention centers. It will be conducted in all of Kentucky's 120 counties and will, for the first time, allow all levels of government to see the scope and magnitude of the jail-funding problem.

The survey has been developed in cooperation with the Kentucky Jailers' Association, the Kentucky County Judge / Executive Association, the Kentucky Association of Magistrates and Commissioners, the Kentucky Association of Counties, the Governor's Office of Local Development, and the Department of Corrections.

As all of you know it is rare for so many separate organizations, with so many separate agendas, to agree on anything, especially in today's climate. This is a testament to the seriousness of the problem and desire of everyone to address the financial pressures jails are causing.

The survey was mailed today to every county treasurer and jailer or director who runs a county's correctional facility. Our professional auditors will be contacting each of them to set up interviews to complete the survey. We have available for your review today.

The jail survey consists of 201 questions, 18 pages, for counties with working jails. A shorter version will be conducted in counties without an operating facility. We expect each Jailer's interview, which are to begin in about a month, to last approximately four hours. This is no small undertaking, but we are dedicated to helping address this crisis.

As an example of survey questions, we will be asking about the total medical expenditures of an open jail and quantifying how much of that cost is paid by the county, the state, or other sources. The survey will ascertain the cost per meal for each facility and exactly how it was purchased. We will also explore the jail's phone service and canteen operation, as well as eleven other management areas.

This survey will give you a comprehensive assessment of how well your jail operates, and how that operation compares to others across the state. Not a guess, but real numbers. You will be able to see exactly what you are getting for what you are paying.

And importantly, for the first time we will be able to give a definitive answer to the question of how much every aspect of operating local detention centers cost state and local governments. This information will be vital as you and your associations work with the administration in Frankfort and state legislators on this issue.

Each fiscal court or council will receive the completed survey for their own county. If major problems are discovered in any county we will immediately contact the Jailer and notify fiscal court so remedies can be sought now, not when they are too late. The Auditor's Office will make appropriate referrals and follow up with additional audit work as warranted.

The final compilation of all the data will be summarized and released in a report to the 2006 session of the General Assembly. It will also be sent to each of the stakeholders in this process.

The survey is not the final goal of the collaborative effort. It is a tool that can be used by each county in improving your jail operations. It can be used in funding discussions with state officials. And it will be used by the Auditor's Office to determine areas for further review and audit. Audit procedures will be discussed with you and the jailer in advance and will be implemented for the fiscal court audits for the year ending June 30, 2006. The report will be a way for

your county to learn from good practices and bad experiences others have already encountered.

On December 1 at the Jailer's Conference at Barren River State Park, auditors, along with representatives from Corrections and GOLD, will discuss preliminary results and work on plans to address problems and implement best practices.

All of these professionals have worked hard on this issue. Please take advantage of their presence and talk with us about your concerns. Your input will be critical as we move forward.

All of us have one boss – the people of Kentucky. This cooperation between agencies and counties is what they expect. We must work together, regardless of party, region, or whatever divides us, to solve the problems that we face.

I appreciate the opportunity to be here today and we look forward to working with you.

Thank you.